Flourishing Adaptive Systems (FAS)

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Abstract. Humans are not just complex adaptive systems; we are flourishing adaptive systems (FAS), because we have human aspirations and tend to flourish. Our wisdom system is multidimensional, and it develops over time. A flourishing adaptive system is guided by its wisdom system to achieve a higher purpose. It seems plausible to augment human practice by developing 8 particular dimensions of wisdom or "wisdom senses". Further exploration of these 8 wisdom senses could lead to designing "wise organizations", and even developing "synthetic flourishing adaptive systems", exploring the frontiers of "artificial wisdom".

Keywords: flourishing, adaptive, system, wisdom.

1 Introduction

The world is changing fast, and we live in turbulent times accelerated by the speed of technological change and massive amounts of information. It seems like society has decided to walk the Data-Information-Knowledge-Wisdom Hierarchy [1] in reverse mode, in search for answers in a sea of big data. Revolutions and recessions have caused some analysts and policymakers to believe we are facing what they call a big global reset, a new normal where many people suffer the consequences of increasingly more difficult conditions of living.

Bringing wisdom back to the center of our societal development could result in a better redefinition of our systems and structures of living. A wiser socio economic system, "by design" and not "by chance", may well benefit from a series of design principles drawn from the well of wisdom. Provided actors follow these "wise design" principles, one could assume that a wiser outcome might be achieved. Is there value in using principles inspired in the multi-dimensionality of wisdom to design "wise" innovations, including organizations themselves? Can we design organizations that are more adaptive and thrive in complex social ecosystems, aiming at individual and organizational flourishing?

2 Flourishing Adaptive Systems

My flourishing adaptive systems model stems from wisdom research by [11] and the work on flourishing by [16] and [17]. I posit that humans have a "wisdom system" whose mission/purpose is "flourishing of self and others." I concentrate on eight subsystems

of the wisdom system (cognitive, intuitive, practical, humane/ethical, aesthetic, adaptive, balanced, and temporal perspective of past, present and future) and their sense and response (i.e., aesthetic sense and aesthetic response). I have chosen these eight because I could research them in the context of human organizations. My research explored this model with a panel of those "seen as wise" by stakeholders in a given social system to discuss these eight elements in the context of "flourishing of self and others," and how/if they have applied these dimensions in past successful change and innovation projects. I'm also exploring how/which ones they would apply in order to design future change (processes, products, organizations, or system change) that will potentially "flourish" in a complex environment. I call this "Wise by Design".

3   Research and Analysis of Findings

My study was based on two methods broadly used in futures research, forecasting and backcasting. The research took participants through an exploration of past, present, and future, aimed at better understanding if, how, and when they would invoke any of the eight dimensions under investigation in their construction of individual and shared perspectives of future organizations in their field of work. There was no explicit mention of the eight dimensions until the end of the third step in a study designed in four steps. The panel recognized wisdom as a complex multidimensional concept that is context dependent [2], time-bound, related to values, knowledge, and experience below consciousness, and requires consistence and judgment to make informed decisions. Out of the more than 33 traits or characteristics that panelists found associated with wisdom, the following 10 where invoked more frequently in different forms during the course of this research: time sensitive, cognitive, higher purpose, ethical, experienced, adaptive, balanced, outcomes oriented, aesthetic, and intuitive. The eight principles under study were part of the ten wisdom senses more used.

Higher Purpose, Higher Outcomes. In a complex and uncertain world, wise leaders [20] prioritize common purpose before personal interests. The pursuit of virtuous outcomes [21] is seen as a sign of responsible leadership, a balancing act between the good, the true, and the beautiful. In this regard, I refer to "higher outcomes" as the result of pursuing a "higher purpose." Panelists also mentioned the concept of intentionally developing "wise processes" in the context of achieving "higher outcomes" and fulfilling the "higher purpose." There seems to be room for systematizing wisdom in practice, as a proactive reflective form of practice rather than just a sentimental reactive form of interpretation of current realities, starting with a clear articulation of a higher purpose and measurable higher outcomes.

ETHOS: Essential to Higher Outcomes Skills. Another important finding of this research is the need to develop intentional skills in order to achieve higher outcomes. Panelists pointed to traditions and rituals as important elements in the culture of institutions that could only be redesigned and aligned to higher outcomes with the presence of the necessary [13], management, and innovation skills. These three categories of distinct skills, leadership, management, and innovation and change, could be

augmented by wisdom traits in what I call "Wisdom-Augmented Practices." This type of "augmentation" would require a systematic application of certain wisdom dimensions. This research found that certain leadership, management, and innovation and change skills could greatly benefit by a "wise" approach. I encourage the reader to think about it this way: If leadership leads organizations to achieve their outcomes, wisdom-augmented leadership is the type of "wise leadership" that leads organizations to obtain higher outcomes.

Wisdom Dimensions and Their Interplay. According to [19] wisdom integrates and balances several spheres of human functioning. This interplay of wisdom attributes was empirically tested in several studies. As authors [2] put it, the outcome is an orchestration of mind and virtue in a quest for excellence. The eight dimensions under study appeared several times during the course of this research, with clear overlaps across them.   When a sense is not fully developed, experts tend to reach out to their trusted networks for advice.

Sense of Time. This was the most invoked dimension of all, even above knowledge and experience. The sensitivity toward the future was characterized by concepts of vision, longevity, long term-ness, sustainability, and planning. The present was characterized by the ability to stay tuned to internal and external variables and conditions, monitoring and scanning the environment to look for trends and signs that could help anticipate the future. The relevance of the past was mentioned several times. It is important not to forget history in order to understand the present and foresee the future. Being aware of organizational foundations, strengths, and weaknesses, and what has made the institution successful in the past.

Sense of Balance. There seemed to imply the need for a balanced approach between vision and action, being mindful that decisions need to be tested before implementation. This sense cuts across all others. Panelists were also confronted with reacting to dilemmas in their industry, and how they think the field will evolve in addressing those tensions. According to [8], wisdom develops in response to wrestling with important dilemmas in life, whether emotional, interpersonal, or existential. Using wisdom as a way to balance competing visions will be essential of complex social sectors.

Practical Sense. The intentional use of experience to avoid "pie in the sky" approaches was mentioned several times. "Learning what worked" for the organization, and seeking out "what works" in other places, being able to assess and evaluate progress versus outcomes, and always keeping the goal in mind, were suggestions on how to implement practical approaches. The study of "phronesis" as practical wisdom has dominated the discourse of organizational wisdom research and the professions. I posit that an intentional pursuit of a higher purpose and setting measurable higher outcomes creates a different dynamic, a dynamic of human flourishing, connecting more dimensions than practical, rational, and ethical in a balanced, forward-looking, beautiful, and adaptive enterprise beyond phronesis.

Ethical Sense. This constitutes the ability to articulate core values, live them, and reinforce them, remaining mindful of the higher purpose and doing what is right and fair. According to [10], being wiser will require more than technical rationality in organizations, but leaders will have to be capable to help others navigate through complex realities, identify the differences between fad and necessary change, and be consistent and prepared to interpret realities as humanely and sensibly as and when necessary. The panel also articulated the ethical dimension as "not being averse to difficult/uncomfortable conversations" and "always asking who benefits and how do they benefit." Part of the challenge of wisdom in practice is that some dimensions, like ethics, could be perceived as "falling outside" [11] the utilitarian values of organizations.

Intuitive Sense. Sometimes referred to as "unconventional wisdom" [11], the intuitive sense is probably the most difficult to explain, precisely because it is about acknowledging visceral and sensory dimensions of judgment, "seeing the unseen," following instincts. A way to develop this sense for panelists in this research was to have "good listening and observation" skills, and "being open to the unexpected and unknown." Some panelists mentioned creativity, while others pointed to monitoring the environment, as processes related to developing an intuitive sense. In the field of knowledge management, wisdom is commonly referred as "intuition based on experience" [18]. Intuition was also paired with forward looking skills and foresight, in association with time-sensitivity.

Aesthetic Sense. This research established a strong connection between "aesthetic" and "authenticity of discourse," as well as pursuing "beautiful outcomes." On the note of this, [10] made reference to the ability to "clearly articulate judgments in an aesthetically pleasing way" (p. 40).Other concepts associated with the aesthetic sense were "sustainability," "trust," "clarity," "simplicity," "long-term shared vision," and "engaging others. This dimension can easily be discussed from the negative side, addressing what "ugly outcomes" [4] would be. Interestingly, some of these comments referred back to the ethical dimension like "unfair" and "unequal." As [14] put it, aesthetics in relation to what he calls Social Practice Wisdom (SPW) is the ability to communicate ideas that are difficult to convey in an expressive, equanimous, pleasurable, and rewarding way.

Cognitive Sense. I captured mentions to rationality, knowledge, love of learning, use of data, effectiveness, and evidence-based decisions. This is the dimension that most often refers to measurement and facts. Another important reference was the ability to ask questions about progress, study itself, and systematically gathering data and analyzing it frequently. There were references to using "vision" as guidance, and "facts" as points of reference for course-correction. According to [3], "Knowledge is necessary but not sufficient for wisdom."

Adaptive Sense. This research showed this dimension related to the capacity of understanding the underlying principles, practices, and structures; also the ability to recognize differences in the beneficiaries of the work (students in this case); taking the ego of the decision making out of the equation in what has been called "ego-transcendence" [12] in developmental psychology; proactively scanning and seeking

feedback from its environment, stakeholders, and   someone's own gut (in a clear interplay with two other dimensions, time-sensitivity and intuition).

4   Conclusions

This research could lead to explore human wisdom as a multidimensional subsystem that can be nurtured and fed, and even accelerated if we embrace all the possibilities. Would we be opening the doors for a new generation of research in pursuit of artificial wisdom?   Can humans and their creations be wiser by design?

Wisdom. Wisdom is both a journey and a destination with the "higher" purpose of human flourishing for self and others. For that journey, all humans have the capacity to develop their own Wisdom System (analogy: the "nervous system") with the 8 dimensions acting as "subsystems" or senses. Wisdom requires time and use. It's not about aging - it's about maximizing the exposure and use of all subsystems over time (aging in a cave doesn't maximize the exposure).

State of Flourishing. At any given time, all "subsystems" are fully operational and ready to engage in a "sense-and-respond" mode, generating outcomes seen as "wise" by others.

Trust. It is the connector between wisdom systems. When a wisdom system feels imbalanced - any of the 8 subsystems is not fully operational -, it reaches out via a "trust pipe" to other wisdom systems to fill the gap.

Flourishing Adaptive Systems. Human creations (products, organizations, systems) can achieve a State of Flourishing if a) the "creation" exhibits "wise markers" in its genetic code that could reveal it was created using "wise principles"; and, b) the "creation" is conceived in a way that has its own "wisdom system" to be able to sense-and-respond with the 8 subsystems.

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